

Stellate Ganglion Block Treatment For PTSD At VA

Veterans who have been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and have not been helped by traditional treatments such as **trauma-focused psychotherapy** and medication may benefit from stellate ganglion block (SGB) treatment. SGB is not a cure for PTSD, and the treatment does not work for everyone.

Veterans who are enrolled in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care can contact their mental health provider for more information about SGB. If a Veteran is eligible to receive SGB treatment, they may be referred to a VA pain clinic, which can be found at many, but not all, VA facilities.

SGB may be an option for a Veteran who:

- » Is diagnosed with PTSD and often feels keyed up, jittery, irritable, and on alert for danger; behaviors that overall are known as **hyperarousal**
- » Is under the care of a VA mental health provider
- » Has tried evidence-based PTSD treatment, such as medication or psychotherapy, and has *not* experienced significant or lasting PTSD symptom improvement

How can SGB help?

SGB may be helpful when used in combination with evidence-based PTSD treatment. Research on this topic is ongoing, but there is growing evidence that SGB may help relieve certain PTSD symptoms such as:

- » Hyperarousal
- » Exaggerated startle responses
- » Anxiety

Once these symptoms are reduced, a Veteran may see more benefit from evidence-based PTSD treatments such as prolonged exposure therapy, cognitive processing therapy, or eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy.

For more information on SGB:

- » See our **video** on SGB.
- » Read this **"60 Minutes"** story featuring VA Long Beach.
- » Check out the **VA Evidence Synthesis Program** brief on SGB for PTSD.
- » View the VA **HSR&D cyberseminar** on the Department of Defense trial of SGB for PTSD.
- » Visit the **CCI webpage**.
- » Contact your VA mental health provider.

About the procedure

An X-ray or ultrasound imaging is used to guide a needle into a bundle of nerves called the stellate ganglion, located near the base of the neck. A local anesthetic is injected in the nerve tissue. In a recent VA clinical demonstration project led by VHA's Center for Compassionate Care Innovation (CCI) and VA Long Beach Healthcare System, more than 185 treatments were given with no harmful effects. Many Veterans experienced immediate relief, while others benefited from a second injection.

